INITIAL STUDY / ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT AND SECTION 4(F) EVALUATION

BEFORE

AFTER

07-LA-405 K.P.41.0/47.6 (P.M. 25.5/29.6)

Federal Highway Administration

California Department of Transportation

June 2000

STATE OF CALIFORNIA
DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

SCH No. 1999111073
07-LA-405-41.0/47.6 (PM 25.5/29.6)
07223-1178A0 and 1178C0

NEGATIVE DECLARATION (CEQA)

Pursuant to: Division 13, Public Resources Code

Description

The proposed project would widen Interstate 405 (San Diego Freeway) from ten to twelve lanes in order to provide one high occupancy vehicle (HOV) lane in each direction. The project would extend from State Route 90 (Marina Freeway) to Interstate 10 (Santa Monica Freeway), in the Cities of Los Angeles and Culver City, in Los Angeles County, a distance of 6.6 kilometers (4.1 miles). In addition, the northbound Sawtelle off-ramp will be closed and the Culver Boulevard on-ramp will be become an off-ramp. A frontage road will be added adjacent to the southbound side, connecting Sawtelle Boulevard to Braddock Drive west of I-405. The project is being proposed to relieve traffic congestion by encouraging commuters to rideshare, and is one of several such projects being considered for I-405 to provide for a continuous HOV facility.

Construction of the proposed project is expected to require approximately three years. Construction activities would be planned and conducted in such a manner as to reduce traffic delay as much as possible. The construction process would be managed by a traffic control plan. Soundwalls and retaining walls would also be constructed as part of the proposed project.

Determination

An Initial Study has been prepared by the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans). On the basis of this study it is determined that the proposed action will not have a significant effect upon the environment for the following reasons:

1. The project would not substantially affect topography, seismic exposure, erosion, floodplains, wetlands or water quality.

2. The proposed project will not significantly affect natural vegetation, sensitive, endangered or threatened plant or animal species, or agriculture.

3. The proposed project will not significantly affect solid wastes, or the consumption of energy and natural resources.

4. The proposed project will promote improved regional air quality.

5. The proposed project will result in increased noise levels along its route, but with the addition of soundwalls, these effects will be reduced to acceptable levels.

6. The proposed project will not significantly affect land use, public facilities or other socioeconomic features.

7. The proposed project will not significantly affect cultural resources, scenic resources, aesthetics, open space or parklands. Landscaping will be provided to mitigate the loss of existing freeway vegetation.

Original Signed by Ronald Kosinski for Raja Mitwasi *June 19, 2000*

Raja Mitwasi, Deputy Director
California Department of Transportation
District 7

Date

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Note: A vertical line in the margin indicates that changes were made in the text from the Draft Environmental Document (Initial Study / Environmental Assessment) to the Final Environmental Document (Negative Declaration / Finding of No Significant Impact).

3. Affected Environment

3.1 Introduction

This Section describes the relevant resources in the areas that would affect or that would be affected by the alternatives if they were implemented. In conjunction with the description of the alternatives in Section 2 and the prediction of effects in Section 4, this section presents the baseline conditions against which the decision makers and the public can review the effects of the alternatives.

The project area is located on the San Diego Freeway (I-405), which is a major link between the San Fernando Valley, LAX, the South Bay, and Orange County. The project area is in the portion of the Los Angeles Metropolitan area which is urbanized with a mix of residential and commercial land use.

3.2 Topography

The project is located in the southwest part of the Los Angeles Basin. The topography is generally flat, gently sloping, and ranges in elevation from approximately 2 to 49 meters (6-161 feet) above sea level.

3.3 Geology, Soils, Seismicity, Hydrology / Water Quality and Floodplain

Geology

Regionally, the project site is located within the Los Angeles Basin, which is situated at the juncture of the Peninsular Range and Transverse Range Provinces. The Los Angeles Basin is divided into four distinct structural blocks separated by major faults or flexures. The existing freeway is located at the southwestern block that includes groups of hills such as Baldwin, Rosecrans, Dominguez, and Signal.

Soils

Structurally, the site is located just east of Baldwin Hills which is described as a gently arched dome, slightly elongated in a northwesterly direction. The rocks and sediments that make up the terrain of the Baldwin Hills were formed during the Quaternary period, the most recent period in geologic time. The sediment consists, for the most part, of interbeded slightly compact to compact sandy silt, silty sand, silt and sand.

The potential for liquefaction exists when fine silts and sands are located below the water table or perched ground water. Liquefaction has been documented to affect soils to ± 15 meters (50 feet) deep, during prolonged periods of ground shaking. Based on a regional study conducted by the U.S. Geological Survey (1985), the relative liquefaction susceptibility along the project study area is considered from very low to medium.

Seismicity

There are no known earthquake faults crossing the project. Although the project is located in a seismically active area, the activity level is considered to be normal for the Southern California region. Ground shaking from a moderate earthquake along the Newport-Inglewood Fault or other distant earthquake faults would have the greatest potential for damage within the project limits.

The Alquist-Priolo Earthquake Fault Zoning Act (APEFZA) was signed into law on December 22, 1972. The purpose of this Act is to prohibit the location of structures for human occupancy across the traces of active faults, thereby minimizing the hazard of fault rupture. The closest earthquake fault zone under the auspices of the APEFZA is the Newport-Inglewood fault, which is located 3.21 km (2.0 miles) to the northeast of the project. Inferred traces of the Hollywood Fault are shown on the geologic map in the project vicinity. Recent investigations suggest that portions of this fault are active. However, at the present time this fault has not been zoned pursuant to APEFZA.

Hydrology / Water Quality

The project area lies within the Los Angeles River Basin of the State Water Resources Control Board (Regional Water Quality Control Board, Los Angeles Region). Specifically, the project is located within the Ballona Creek Watershed. The watershed drains an area that is 130 square miles (209 km^2) and is shown in Figure 3.

Two drainages, Ballona Creek and the Westwood Flood Control Channel, cross the project area. However, both are concrete lined flood control channels and contain no vegetation.

This project will marginally increase storm water runoff into the nearby drainage channels and other water related resources which constitute the Ballona Creek Watershed.

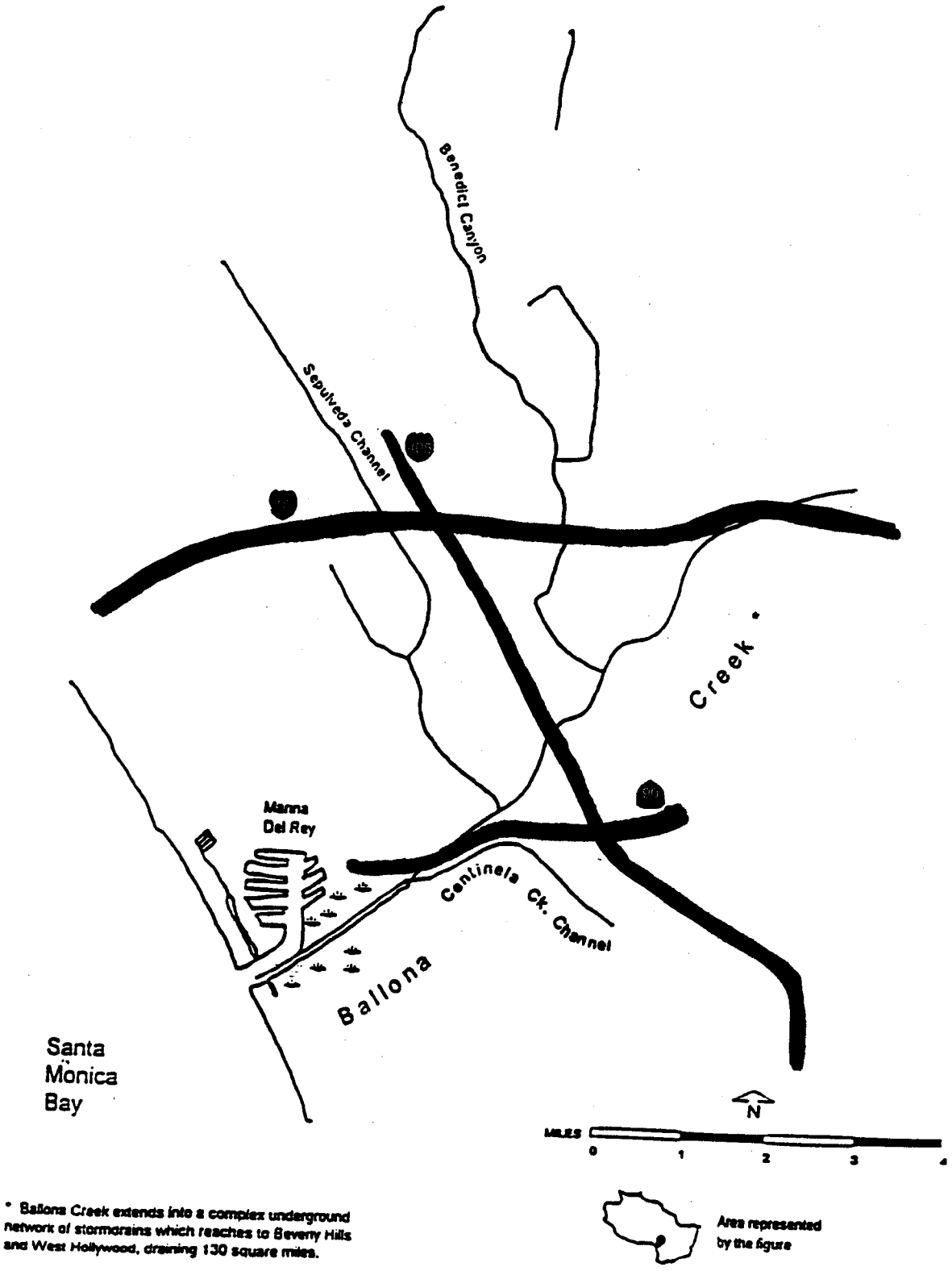
Floodplain

The Federal Flood Insurance Rate Maps within the project area include both Los Angeles County [060137-0071, 060137-0078, 060137-0084] .and the City of Culver City [060114-0005] maps. The portions of the proposed project that are located inside of the 100-year flood zone have been classified on the flood zone maps as "contained within a channel."

3.4 Air Quality

The Cities of Los Angeles and Culver City both lie within the South Coast Air Quality Management District's jurisdictional boundaries. The Clean Air Act Amendments of 1990 requires that transportation plans, programs and projects which are funded by or approved under Title 23 U.S.C. or Federal Transit Act conform with state or federal air quality plans. In order to be found in conformance, a project must come from approved transportation plans and programs and the regional Transportation Improvement Program (RTIP). A necessary pre-requisite for inclusion in the RTIP is that the project must have been modeled in the regional model run for its emissions effects. See Section 5.1 for air quality analyses and conformance statement.

Figure 3 – Ballona Creek Watershed



* Ballona Creek extends into a complex underground network of stormdrains which reaches to Beverly Hills and West Hollywood, draining 130 square miles.

The Federal Clean Air Act (CAA) establishes federal Air Quality Standards known as the National Ambient Air Quality Standards (NAAQS) and specifies future dates for achieving compliance. The CAA also mandates that the State submits and implements the State Implementation Plan for local areas not meeting these standards. These plans must include pollution control measures that demonstrate how the standards will be met. The California Clean Air Act requires all areas of the State to achieve and maintain the California Ambient Air Quality Standards (CAAQS) by the earliest practical date. These standards encompass the most common varieties of airborne materials, which can pose a health hazard to the most sensitive individuals in the population. Pollutants for which ambient standards have been set are referred to as "criteria pollutants". Criteria pollutants include the following: Ozone (O_3), Carbon Monoxide (CO), Nitrogen Dioxide, Fine Particulate Matter (PM_{10}), and Lead. This project is located in the South Coast Air Basin, which is designated as nonattainment area for federal and state standards for O_3, CO and PM_{10}.

3.5 Noise

The noise prediction model used in this report is referred to as the San Francisco Highway Traffic Noise Prediction Program. It is based upon the theory presented in the Federal Highway Administration Report FHWA-RD-77-1018, Highway Traffic Noise Prediction Model, December, 1978. This LEQV2 model uses the California Vehicle Noise (Calveno) reference energy mean emission level curves and the Leq (hourly energy equivalent sound level) noise descriptor. The parameters for using the model are topography, traffic, and roadway characteristics. The noise measurement and prediction are in compliance with the Code of Federal Regulations (23 CFR Part 772) August 1990. This descriptor is the equivalent steady-state noise level, which in a state period of time contains the same acoustic energy as the varying noise level during the same period.

Noise levels were measured at the most representative sites on the southbound and northbound side of the freeway from 9:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. (noon), and the values ranged from 58 decibels (dBA) to 77 dBA. Future noise levels at these sites are expected to increase by anywhere from 0 to 3 decibels.

3.6 Hazardous Waste

The Initial Site Assessment (ISA) for the proposed project (completed October 1995) indicates a potential for aerial deposition of lead from motor vehicle exhaust. Contaminated sites may be located adjacent to the highway and may impact the project during the construction stage. In addition, asbestos and leaded paint may exist in the building materials in some of the structures of the parcels that will be acquired for this project. Due to fluctuating groundwater levels, contamination may be unearthed during construction excavation or other activities. Caltrans Offices of Right-of-Way and Legal should be consulted regarding the acquisition and future reselling of these parcels as excess lands, as they may be considered contaminated properties.

Many businesses adjacent to the project area may have hazardous materials or wastes but will not be acquired. Several businesses (e.g. service station, auto tire shop, and others) have a potential for hazardous waste contamination. The Los Angeles Regional Water Quality Control Board (LARWQCB) has identified most of these properties as the sources for current

groundwater contamination in the project area. The LARWQCB is enforcing the groundwater cleanup in the project area, and Caltrans will not be held responsible.

3.7 Biological Resources

Wetlands

Two drainage courses (Ballona Creek and Westwood Flood Control Channel) lie within the project area. Both drainages are concrete-lined, and do not qualify as state or federal wetlands. Therefore, the drainages do not fall under the jurisdiction of the Army Corps of Engineers (ACOE) or the California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG).

Vegetation

Native vegetation has largely been replaced by introduced species. The freeway and surrounding developments have been landscaped with trees and various ornamental ground covers.

Fish and Wildlife

Although landscaping is not considered a biological resource, it does provide food and shelter for wildlife species adapted to urban environments. Avian species expected to occur in this habitat include the western fence lizard, starling, house sparrow, rock dove, mockingbird, house finch, and the house mouse.

A search of the CDFG Natural Diversity Data Base did not identify any sensitive species known to occur, or likely to occur, within the project limits. Although the following four species have been previously sighted within a two-mile radius of the project, they are presumed to be absent from the project area because their habitat requirements cannot be met.

- Mud Nama (*Nama stenocarpum*) – Natural lake shores and river banks are not present
- Monarch Butterfly (*Danaus plexippus*) – Requires protected Eucalyptus / Monterey Pine / Cypress Groves, which are not present
- California least tern (*Sterna antillarium browni*) – Sandy beaches and alkali flats are not present
- California gnatcatcher (*Polioptilla californica*) – An obligate resident of coastal sage scrub, which is not present

Additionally, the various species of bats and swallows that migrate through Southern California normally utilize bridges over drainages for nesting purposes. However, because both drainages within the project limits are concrete lined and contain no vegetation, these species are not expected to be present.

Executive Order 13112, Invasive Species

On February 3, 1999, Executive Order 13112 (E.O. 13112) was signed into law which calls on Executive Branch agencies to work to prevent and control the introduction and spread of invasive species. Executive Order 13112 builds on the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969, the Federal Noxious Weed Act of 1974, and the Endangered Species Act of 1973 to prevent the introduction of invasive species, provide for their control and take measures to minimize economic, ecological, and human health impacts. Under this Executive Order, Federal agencies cannot authorize, fund or carry out actions that it believes are likely to cause or promote the introduction or spread of invasive species in the United States or elsewhere unless all reasonable measures to minimize risk of harm have been analyzed and considered.

3.8 Land Use and Planning

The project area is heavily urbanized. Land use is somewhat varied, but mostly residential and commercial. The immediate project area is bounded by Sawtelle Boulevard to the west, Sepulveda Boulevard to the east, Pico Boulevard to the north, and Jefferson Boulevard to the south. The project area includes light retail uses, fast food restaurants, and service stations. To the west of this segment of I-405 is a junior high school, a hospital, Mar Vista Gardens, public parks, banks, and many single-family houses. To the east are Culver Center, MGM Studios, Culver City High School, Raintree Plaza, and West Los Angeles College.

To the north and south of this segment of I-405 are single-family residential neighborhoods, Hughes Airport, Fox Hills Mall, and other recreation areas. The ramps and connectors serve these areas and the more distant communities in West Los Angeles, Culver City, and Baldwin Hills.

3.9 Social and Economic Resources

The areas within and adjacent to the project area are predominantly middle- to upper-middle income compared with the average for City and County estimates (Figure 4, Table 7). In general, minority populations are proportionate to surrounding communities (Table 8). The hispanic minority group in Census Tract 2751 was 58%, which represents about 1,087 households. However, the number of actual properties impacted by this project is less than 2.7% of the total housing within the Tract.

A large number of vacancies within the project area (Table 9) are indicative of a plentiful housing supply for households displaced by the project. In 1997, the Housing Affordability Index, indicating the percent of households who can afford to purchase a median priced home, was estimated to be about 40% in Los Angeles County.

It is the policy of the California State Department of Transportation, in accordance with the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Civil Rights Restoration Act of 1987, Title 49 CFR Part 21 and related statutes and regulations that no person in the State of California, shall, on the grounds of race, color, sex, age, national origin, religion, or disabling condition, be excluded from

Figure 4 – Census Tracts in the Project Area

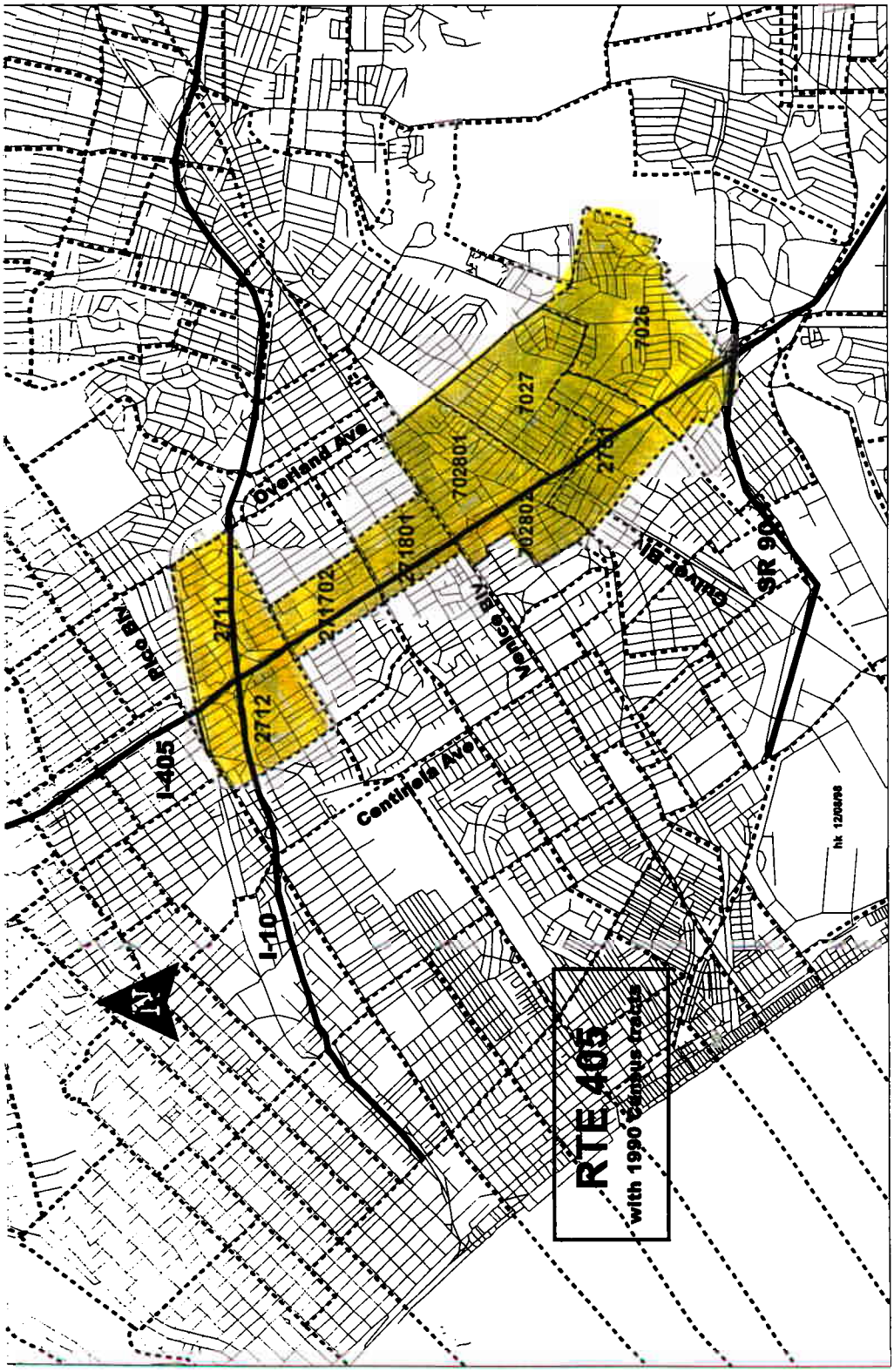


Table 7 – Study Area Demographic Variables[1]

Jurisdiction	Census Tract	Population	Median Household Income[2]
Los Angeles	2711	3,532	$37,096
	2712	3,799	$35,096
	2717-02	3,874	$24,364
	2718-01	4,205	$33,244
	2751	5,708	$32,873
Los Angeles City Average		3,485,398	$30,925
Culver City	7026	6,280	$50,885
	7027	3,355	$49,821
	7028-01	4,983	$35,868
	7028-02	2,217	$35,347
Culver City Average		38,793	$42,971
Los Angeles County Average		8,863,164	$34,965

1. *Data obtained from the 1990 United States Census Bureau.*
2. *Median income for the study area is the average of all median incomes in the study area census tracts.*

Table 8 – Study Area Ethnic Composition[1]

Census Tract	Percentage[2] White	Black	Native American	Asian	Other	Hispanic
2711	64.2	2.2	0.4	17.3	0.0	15.9
2712	49.2	2.6	0.2	18.5	0.0	29.5
2717-02	56.2	5.7	0.0	28.1	0.5	9.5
2718-01	59.2	6.1	0.4	13.9	1.1	19.6
2751	28.6	3.7	0.5	8.6	0.6	58.0
City of Los Angeles	37.5	13.2	0.3	9.4	0.3	39.3
7026	67.5	3.9	0.0	14.9	0.2	13.5
7027	66.4	1.3	0.0	14.1	0.7	17.4
7028-01	49.7	4.5	0.4	16.7	0.0	28.8
7028-02	61.9	3.0	0.0	13.0	0.2	21.8
City of Culver City	57.9	10.2	0.2	12.0	0.3	19.4
Los Angeles County	40.8	10.7	0.3	10.4	0.2	37.3

1. *Data obtained from the 1990 United States Census Bureau.*
2. *Data are percentage (%) of each minority group as identified in the 1990 Census.*

Table 9 – Vacancy Information Among the Census Tracts in the Project Area[1]

Census Tract	Total Housing	Vacant Units	Occupied Housing
2711	1,655	148	1,507
2712	1,744	104	1,640
2717-02	1,679	67	1,612
2718-01	2,333	284	2,049
2751	1,875	112	1,763
City of Los Angeles	1,299,963	82,558	1,217,405
7026	2,254	55	2,199
7027	1,291	30	1,261
7028-01	1,952	88	1,864
7028-02	883	23	860
City of Culver City	16,943	777	16,166
Los Angeles County	3,163,343	173,791	2,989,552

1. *Data obtained from the 1990 United States Census Bureau.*

participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be otherwise subjected to discrimination under any program or activity administered by the Department.

3.10 Public Services and Facilities

Public services and facilities include schools, fire stations, police stations, medical institutions, and parks and recreational facilities. A number of public services and facilities are located within the project area. The facilities include the following:

- Culver City Fire Station #2, 11252 Washington Blvd., Culver City
- Webster Junior High School, 11330 Graham Place, Los Angeles
- Culver City Chamber of Commerce, 10767 Washington Blvd., Culver City
- Culver City City Hall, 9770 Culver Blvd., Culver City
- Washington Medical Center, 12101 Washington Blvd., Culver City
- Culver Slauson Park, 5070 Slauson Ave., Los Angeles
- El Marino Park, Berryman Ave. and Diller Ave., Culver City
- Mar Vista Gardens, 4901 Marionwood Dr., Los Angeles
- Mar Vista Recreation Center, 11430 Woodbine St., Los Angeles
- Tellefson Park, Washington Place and Bentley Ave., Culver City

3.11 Cultural Resources

To identify historic and archaeological resources, an Area of Potential Effect (APE) was established as extending one property beyond the existing facility and associated frontage roads. When additional right-of-way was required, the APE was enlarged to account for right-of-way acquisitions and potential visual effects resulting from the removal of existing buildings.

An Archaeological Survey Report (ASR), prepared for this project, determined that no archaeological sites are known to exist within, or adjacent to, the project area.

The historical setting was researched through a number of lists, sources, and field surveys. No buildings were determined to be sensitive cultural resources as they were (1) less than 50 years of age and lacking in overriding significance or (2) more than 50 years of age, but substantially altered or lacking in historical significance. The FHWA has concurred with the Historic Property Survey Report (HPSR) and it was reviewed for concurrence by the State Office of Historic Preservation (SHPO). A letter of concurrence from the SHPO (dated March 2, 2000) can be found in Appendix H. Due to the Modified Alternative 3ab, additional properties not previously identified needed to be studied for historical significance. A Supplemental HPSR was sent to FHWA for concurrence and then forwarded to SHPO. A letter of concurrence from the SHPO for the additional properties can also be found in

Appendix H. The corridor was identified as a mostly residential, post-World War II urban landscape. In addition, no historic areas or districts were found to be located within the APE.